

## Germany in Revolution, 1848–49

### 1 Causes of Revolutionary Movements

1848 was a year to remember in Europe, a year of dramatic, violent events, of hope and of failure. It was the year of death in the cholera epidemic, which swept across Europe from Asia, causing such loss of life that for a while society in many areas was totally disorganized. It was the year of birth in the publication of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. This did not have the drama of the cholera epidemic and attracted little attention at the time, but in twenty years its message had spread across Europe and beyond to become, a century later, the basis of the political system of half the world. It began as a year of hope in the revolutions which broke out all over Europe. But it ended as a year of failure.

The revolutions were widespread, in France, in the German Confederation, in the Habsburg lands including Austria and Hungary, and in Italy. At first the revolutions seemed very successful. Even Metternich, the apparently immovable senior statesman of Europe, was forced into exile by events in Vienna, and in France Louise-Philippe lost his throne.

Why did these revolutions all happen in the same year? Historians used to think that the French troubles, which began in February 1848, simply triggered off copy-cat revolutions in other countries. Now the generally accepted view is that the revolutions took place at about the same time because conditions in France, Germany and the Austrian Empire were all very similar. These conditions, economic and social, were of the kind which give rise to revolutions.

\* Since the middle of the previous century important changes had occurred in Europe. The population had grown dramatically, towns had increased in size and number, and industry had developed out of all recognition. Life in 1848 was very different from what it had been in 1748.

The reasons why the population doubled in the century up to 1848 are not certain. Economic historians can only say that it was more probably due to a declining death rate than to an increasing birth rate. In Prussia the population in the countryside increased by nearly 75 per cent between 1815 and 1848. Many people left the land and drifted to the towns in search of work or went to other parts of the world. Of the quarter of a million who left Germany in 1840s, most went to the United States in search of land and food.

\* Those who remained in the countryside found life very hard. In eastern Prussia much of the land belonged to the *Junkers*, the landowning military aristocracy, and was worked by landless peasants. Even in the parts of Germany where the peasants had become tenant farmers rents were very high. It was difficult to make a living.

In 1846 and 1847 the corn harvests were disastrous and the situation

was made worse by a serious outbreak of potato blight. Potatoes were the main item of diet for most German peasants, and failure of the crop meant starvation. There was distress and unrest, and food riots broke out. There had been poor harvests before, but the increased population made the position worse.

\* The towns, especially the industrial towns, also felt the pressure on food supplies, and there was a sharp rise in food prices. Cereal prices increased by nearly 50 per cent in 1847. The cost of living rose steeply for everyone, but the workers suffered most, particularly those in the textile mills. The textile industry was going through difficult times. A recession started in 1847 and wages were cut. Higher prices and lower wages coincided and the workers' standard of living fell. Cheap alcohol gave some comfort in a hard life, and contemporary writers describe the great increase in drunkenness, especially among women and children factory workers.

Even in good times the workers did not live well. They were poorly clothed and inadequately fed. From the mid 1840s there was unemployment in many industries. One observer reported that unemployed factory workers were living worse than prisoners in dirty, damp and overcrowded accommodation, often twenty people to a room, six or seven to a bed. When work was available, working conditions were grim. The machines, especially in the textile factories, were not designed with the workers in mind. Men, women and children worked for 13 or more hours a day, often in cramped and awkward positions, crouched over the machines. This led to deformities of one kind or another among many of the workers. Men and women of 30 were already old.

\* In both town and country, among workers and peasants, there was growing unrest. Dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs, they began to make demands. They wanted a better life for themselves and their families with enough food, reasonable housing, a shorter working day and improved working conditions. Their demands were clear, limited, practical and basically non-political. In fact they were, with few exceptions, not concerned with politics and political theories; they were only interested in the kind of government they had in so far as it affected their daily lives.

There were exceptions, of course. In towns like Cologne and Bonn the skilled craftsmen had their own trade organizations, and kept themselves apart from the unskilled factory workers, whom they both despised and feared. These skilled workers were articulate and politically aware. During 1848 they staged demonstrations, and elected representative assemblies to discuss their grievances. The assembly, or congress, held at Frankfurt drew up an Industrial Code to regulate hours of work, rates of pay and so on. (They later presented the Code to the Frankfurt Parliament for approval but it was turned down). At the time of the riots in Berlin in March 1848 some politically active workers organized themselves into Workers' Committees, demanding among other things the

formation of trades unions, free education and a guaranteed minimum wage.

For Karl Marx and his supporters these events showed the development of a 'working class consciousness'. By this they meant that the workers had realized that, because the middle and upper classes owned the means of production (factories, mills, mines etc.), they must unite together in revolution to change this if they were to improve the quality of their lives. Some historians believe that the revolutions of 1848 originated with the workers, and certainly they were the ones who fought and died in the streets behind the barricades; but it was not only the workers who made the revolutions. Others played an important part, particularly the educated middle classes.

\* The middle classes in Germany were suffering from frustration. There were not enough jobs to go round for the men qualified to become doctors, lawyers, teachers and civil servants. Career opportunities were limited, particularly in the civil service where all the senior posts were filled by members of the nobility. They were frustrated too by their lack of power, for in 1848 power lay where it always had, with the nobility. They owned the land, filled senior government jobs, officered the army, and guarded their privileges jealously against any infiltration by the middle classes.

The new political ideas of liberalism and nationalism, which were developing during the first half of the nineteenth century, proved very attractive to the dissatisfied middle classes (see page 10). By 1847 patriotism was running high, and the feelings of many Germans were expressed in a memorandum written by Prince Hohenlohe:

- 1 In the history of every nation there is an epoch in which it comes to full self consciousness and claims liberty to determine its own destiny. . . . We Germans have reached this stage. The nation demands a share in public administration as never before. . . . No one will deny that it is hard on an energetic thinking man to be unable to say abroad 'I am a German' – not to be able to pride himself that the German flag is flying from his vessel, to have no German consul in case of emergency, but have to explain 'I am a Hessian, a Darmstädter, a Bückeburger; my fatherland was once a great and powerful country, now it is shattered into nine and thirty splinters.'

## 2 Constitutional Movements

In the end the impetus for a German national revolution came surprisingly from the small, and hitherto undistinguished state of Baden in south-west Germany. There was already in Baden a constitution with a representative assembly elected on a wider franchise than in any other German state, and the people of Baden were more politically conscious

than elsewhere in Germany. For years before 1847 the liberal politicians of Baden had been proposing a united Germany instead of the loose Confederation. Now they put their views forcefully to an assembly of liberals from all the south-west German states. (see page 15). This assembly, which met in October 1847, agreed on the urgent need for an independent German People's Parliament.

While this meeting was going on, radical politicians were holding their own meetings in south-west Germany, and again proceedings were dominated by the representatives from Baden. The radicals wanted fairer taxation, education for all, a people's army, better relations between employees and workers, and most important, the establishment of a united German Republic.

\* The dramatic news of revolution in Paris in February 1848 brought the liberals and radicals together at a meeting in Heidelberg. There representatives from six states, including Prussia, discussed urgent changes in German political institutions on a national basis. Their decisions were published in the Declaration of Heidelberg:

- 1 Heidelberg, 5th March. Today fifty-one men were assembled here, from Prussia, Bavaria, Wurtemberg, Baden, Nassau and Frankfurt, almost all members of state assemblies, in order to discuss the most urgent measures for the Fatherland in this moment of decision.

Unanimously resolved in their devotion to the freedom, unity, independence and honour of the German nation, they all express their conviction that the establishment and defence of these highest blessings must be attempted by co-operation of all the German peoples with their governments, so long as delivery is still possible in this manner.

No less unanimous was the deep expression of sorrow that sad experience of the effectiveness of the German Confederation authorities has shaken confidence in them so much, that an address of the citizens to them would evoke the worst discord.

The assembled unanimously expressed their conviction of what the Fatherland urgently needs as follows:

'Germany must not be involved in war through intervention in the affairs of the neighbouring country or through non-recognition of the changes in the state made there.

Germans must not be caused to diminish or rob from other nations the freedom and independence which they themselves ask as their right.

The meeting of a national representation elected in all the German lands according to the number of the people must not be postponed, both for the removal of imminent internal and external dangers, and for the development of the strength and flowering of German national life!

At the same time they have agreed to concentrate their efforts so that as soon as possible a more complete assembly of men of trust from all German peoples should come together in order to continue deliberation of this most important matter and to offer its co-operation to the Fatherland as well as to the Governments.

To this end seven members were requested to prepare proposals concerning the election and the establishment of an appropriate national representation and speedily to take care of the invitations to an assembly of German men.

A main task of the national representation will in any case be common defence . . . and external representation, whereby great sums of money will be saved for other important needs, while at the same time the identity and suitable self-administration of the different states remains in existence.

With the prudent, faithful and manly co-operation of all Germans, the Fatherland may hope to achieve and to maintain freedom, unity and order in the most difficult situations, and joyfully to greet the advent of a hardly expected strength and flowering. . . .

\* Invitations for the proposed 'assembly of German men' were quickly issued, and the assembly met at the end of the month. This assembly is known as the *Vorparlament*, usually translated as 'Pre-Parliament', but better thought of as 'Preparatory Parliament', which was preparing the way for the proposed national parliament, the real parliament.

The *Vorparlament* met at Frankfurt, chosen because it was already the meeting place of the Diet of the Confederation. A total of 574 representatives, from almost all the states of the Confederation, squeezed themselves into the pews of the *Pauluskirche* (St. Paul's Church), where for the next four days they talked and argued. Eventually they reached an agreement on how to elect a national Constituent Assembly or Parliament. Once elected this Parliament was to draw up a constitution for a united Germany.

It was decided that the Parliament should consist of one representative for every 50 000 inhabitants and be elected by citizens, who were of age and 'economically independent'. It was left to individual states to decide who was an independent citizen. Some states decided on a residence qualification, some on ownership of property. Although the *Vorparlament* did not actually say so, it was assumed that only men could vote, so women were excluded from the franchise along with servants, farm labourers and anyone receiving poor relief. This last category alone excluded large numbers – in Cologne nearly a third of the population was on poor relief.

#### a) *The Frankfurt Parliament*

In most states the elections were indirect. The voters elected 'electors',

who in their turn chose representatives to be sent to the Assembly. The Assembly when it met in Frankfurt in May 1848 was therefore not very representative of the population as a whole. This was not surprising in view of the restrictions on those who could vote. Of the 596 members, the vast majority were middle class. There were large numbers of teachers, professors, lawyers and government officials. It was probably the best-educated Parliament ever – over 80 per cent of the members held university degrees, mostly in law. There were a few landowners, four craftsmen and one peasant.

Its composition made the Assembly, or Frankfurt Parliament as it came to be called, moderate liberal in politics. There was nothing radical, revolutionary or republican about it, apart from its small minority of extremist members. Its aim was to establish a united Germany under a constitutional monarch who would rule through an elected Parliament. It had been a great achievement to have got the Parliament elected, convened and ready to begin work in only a little over a month. Elections had been organized on a national scale for the first time and they had been carried out peacefully and successfully.

Now came the moment of truth. Could the Parliament carry out the programme which the *Vorparlament* had drawn up? Apart from drawing up a national constitution, which the *Vorparlament* saw as the main task of the Parliament, the programme recommended approval of a series of 'Basic Rights and Demands', such as freedom of the press, fair taxation, equality of political rights without regard to religion, separation of Church and State, and German citizenship for all.

The Parliament started by considering the relationship between itself and the individual states. The Confederation had been an association in which the state had a very large degree of independence from federal control. The authority of the Diet, never very impressive, had become weaker and more ineffective. The Frankfurt Parliament's intention was that the new 'Germany' should have much stronger central government, with correspondingly greater control over the actions of the states. It quickly decided that any national constitution which it framed would be sovereign, and that while state parliaments would be free to make state laws, they would only be valid if they did not conflict with that constitution. So by the end of May the Frankfurt Parliament had declared its authority over the states, their parliaments and Princes. Now it remained to draw up a constitution and to organize a government.

\* Most members of the Parliament could accept that the logical approach would be to agree a constitution and then to set up a government according to its terms. But it was another matter to find a majority of members who favoured any one procedure for carrying out these tasks, or who shared similar views on the details of the constitution established. Without the discipline imposed by well-organized political parties and without the dominance provided by outstanding leaders, the Frankfurt Parliament became a 'talking shop' in which it was very

difficult to reach agreement on anything.

It quickly became clear that it would not be possible to reach rapid agreement on a constitution. Steps were therefore taken to establish a provisional government to rule in the meantime. But although agreement was reached on generalities such as the powers of the provisional government, so little was agreed about the specific ways in which these powers were to be carried out that the 'Provisional Central Power' established at the end of June was largely ineffectual.

The Provisional Central Power provided for an Imperial Regent, or Vicar of the Empire, to be elected by the Parliament. He was to govern through ministers, appointed by him and responsible to Parliament, until such time as a decision about the constitution could be reached. An elderly Austrian Archduke, John, was elected as Regent. He was an unusual Archduke, married to the daughter of a village postmaster, and with known liberal views and German nationalist sympathies. He duly appointed a number of ministers but, as they did not have any staff or offices, and their duties were not clearly defined, they could do little.

As the summer went on, it seemed less and less likely that the German Confederation would be transformed into a united Germany by the efforts of the Parliament. Nevertheless, the Parliament did not give up, and continued its interminable debate over the constitution. In December, the Fifty Articles of the fundamental rights of the German citizen were approved and became law. For the Parliament to have reached this degree of agreement was by now an unexpected achievement. The Articles included equality before the law, freedom of worship and freedom of the press, freedom from arrest without warrant, and an end to discrimination because of class.

\* Apart from the constitution, other problems beset the Parliament. One concerned the territorial extent of 'Germany'. Should it include all German-speaking lands, even those within that part of the Austrian Empire which lay outside the Confederation, or should it include only the states of the Confederation? The existing boundaries of the Confederation did not conform to any logical definition of 'Germany'. Parts of the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire were included while others were not. Those parts that were within the Confederation contained many Czechs and Poles while some of the excluded provinces had an overwhelmingly German-speaking population. Seemingly most illogical of all, French-speaking Luxemburg, ruled over by the King of the Netherlands, was a part of the Confederation (see map on page 2).

So how, in this confusion, should the new German state be defined, bearing in mind the nationalist creed that a common language indicated a common racial origin? The Parliament was as usual divided between the members who wanted a *Grossdeutschland* (Great Germany) which would include the predominantly German-speaking provinces of the Austrian Empire, and those who favoured a *Kleindeutschland* (Little Germany) which would exclude Austria but include the whole of Prussia. The

*Grossdeutschland* plan would maintain the leadership of Germany by Catholic Austria, while the *Kleindeutschland* plan would leave Protestant Prussia as the dominant German state. The Parliament was unable to decide between the two proposals, and the argument dragged on inconclusively.

\* Another problem worrying the Parliament involved the army. In order to exert its authority the central government would need a loyal army. The only army in any way capable of acting as a national army in 1848 was the Prussian one. A Prussian general was appointed as Minister of War, but he agreed to accept the post only on condition that the Prussian army would remain independent. In addition, he insisted that he could not act in any way contrary to the wishes of the King of Prussia. As Minister of War he did try to persuade the rulers of Bavaria and Austria, the only states which had armies of any significance, to join with Prussia if 'exceptional circumstances' should make it necessary to field a national German army, but he failed. Without an army loyal to it, the authority of the central power remained theory rather than fact.

\* Throughout the winter of 1848–9 the Parliament continued its debate, and in March 1849, to many people's surprise, a Constitution for a German Empire was finally agreed. There were to be two houses, the lower house to be elected by a secret ballot among men over the age of 25 and of 'good reputation', the upper house to be made up of the reigning monarchs and princes of the Confederation. The two houses would have control over legislation and finance, and although the Emperor would have considerable power, he would only be able to hold up legislation for a limited time. A compromise between liberals and radicals was agreed, by which the radicals accepted the idea of a Prussian Emperor in return for concessions which made the franchise more democratic. The Parliament offered the Crown to the King of Prussia, but he refused it (see page 36). The rulers of Bavaria, Saxony and Hanover together with Prussia rejected the new constitution.

### b) *The Failure of the Parliament*

In the face of these disappointments, many members of Parliament lost heart and Austrian and Prussian representatives went home. The remnants, about 130 of them, mostly from south German states, made one last attempt to recover the situation. They called for the election of the first new German Parliament, or *Reichstag*, in the following August, but the call fell on deaf ears. The moment was past, the high hopes gone. The Parliament was driven out of Frankfurt by the city government and moved to Stuttgart, the capital of the Kingdom of Württemberg. There it was forcibly dispersed by the King's soldiers in June 1849. So ended the Frankfurt experiment.

\* Why did the Frankfurt Parliament fail? It started with the advantage that the old Diet of the Confederation had agreed to its own demise and

had nominated the Parliament as its legal successor. This meant the Parliament had no national rival. It was the sole national representative body. But this was its only advantage, and its only strength. Its disadvantages and weaknesses were many and decisive.

There were two main reasons for the Parliament's failure. One was the divisions among its members, which so slowed down the making of decisions that it missed the opportunity of filling the power vacuum that existed in much of Germany in the second half of 1848. The radical minority, who wanted to change society, do away with the princes and replace them with a republic, were less concerned with constitution making than with the overthrow of existing governments. They found themselves in conflict with the majority of liberal members who wanted a moderate settlement which would safeguard both the rights of individual states and of the central government, and with a minimum of social change. A written constitution accepted by the national monarch would protect the rights of an elected parliament within a reorganized Confederation. There was also a small conservative group who wanted to preserve the rights of individual states and ensure that neither the Frankfurt Parliament nor the central government would exercise too much control. These groups were not organized like modern political parties, but were loose undisciplined associations within which there were many shades of opinion and divergent belief. In addition to the three main groups there were a large number of independent, politically uncommitted members. For much of the time it proved impossible to resolve the differences between the members sufficiently to arrive at even a majority decision. This was something that the liberals, because of their numerical superiority, had not expected, and with which they were unable to deal successfully. This wide and unresolved division of opinion within the Parliament doomed it to failure almost from the start because it was unable to take the decisive action without which there could be no hope of success.

The Parliament was further handicapped by its unwise choice of leader, Heinrich von Gagern. He was a distinguished liberal politician, sincere and well meaning, but without the force of character needed to dominate the assembly and direct the debate.

The other main reason for failure was the fact that the authority of Parliament had never been accepted wholeheartedly by the individual states. Also, the Parliament lacked effective administration. No proper government organization was set up, and there was no military backing to enforce its decrees. Without these, the decisions it took were unlikely to be implemented. In many ways it was a triumph for the Frankfurt Parliament ever to have met, given the difficulties of arranging elections at short notice in 39 states. That it failed to achieve its aims was predictable, given the inexperience of its members and the opposition of the rulers who generally wished to restore the status quo.

When the ruling monarchs and princes feared that they were about to

lose many of their powers or even their thrones because of revolutions within their own territories, they were generally prepared to appear to support the work of the Frankfurt Parliament in case, by opposing it, they should stir up more opposition to their rule. But once the rulers were able to re-establish their authority they lost all reason to support the parliamentarians who seemed certain to attempt to diminish the powers of the individual states in favour of the larger states, especially Austria and Prussia. When the new Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph, regained control of all his territories in March 1849, all hope of a *Grossdeutschland* disappeared. It was well known that the Austrian government would have nothing to do with such a revolutionary change. And once effective Austrian opposition was established, it was almost certain that no other ruler would dare to be seen to be taking the lead in establishing a German Empire, even if he had supported the establishment of a liberal Empire of the type the parliamentarians envisaged. Thus the Frankfurt Parliament, which had at first seemed to offer the way forward for national revival, became an irrelevancy and embarrassment whose continued existence offered the possibility of further social and political upheavals. Most rulers were pleased to see it go.

### 3 Prussia

In the immediate future the hopes of the German nationalists lay with Prussia, and her King Frederick William IV. Frederick William was a strange and complex character, sensitive, artistic, cultured and charming, but moody and unpredictable and so unstable that later in life he was to be declared insane. He was obsessed by a romantic and highly inaccurate vision of the Middle Ages, and looked back nostalgically to the days of the Holy Roman Empire and an unquestioned belief in the divine right of Kings. He had a mystical idea of kingship and its privileges and duties.

- 1 I am moved to declare solemnly that no power on earth will ever succeed in prevailing on me to transform the natural relationship between prince and people . . . into a constitutional one. Never will I permit a written sheet of paper to come between our God in
- 5 Heaven and this land . . . to rule us with its paragraphs and supplement the old sacred loyalty.

At the beginning of his reign in 1840 it seemed that Frederick William might be a reforming monarch, who would make the government more liberal and democratic. He released political prisoners, abolished censorship and gave greater power to the eight provincial Diets in Prussia, but these concessions had the opposite effect to that which he expected. Instead of calming unrest, they increased it. They encouraged liberal agitation for a proper constitution as promised in the Vienna Settlement of 1815 and they upset the conservative-minded *Junker*

nobility. Angered by opposition, Frederick William returned to restrictive policies. He suppressed newspapers criticizing his government, particularly articles by Karl Marx. Then in 1847 he swung back to what at first seemed more liberal ideas and called a meeting of the United Diet in Berlin (see page 15). This uncertain wavering between the traditional conservative autocrat and the liberal monarch was a facet of his general instability and was a pattern which Frederick William was to repeat many times during the revolutions of 1848 and the events of 1849.

\* When the news of the revolution in Paris reached Berlin, a demonstration by workers, mostly self-employed craftsmen, took place in the palace square on 13 March 1848. The demonstrators threw stones at the troops and the troops replied by opening fire with cannon and rifles. 'Ferocious scenes' followed. Deputations of leading citizens called on the King and asked him to make political concessions, while fighting continued in a confused way during the next two days. The craftsmen were joined by factory workers and others. The original demonstrations began as a protest about pay and working conditions, but quickly turned into a general, if vague, demand for 'the maintenance of the rights irrefutably belonging to the people of the state'.

Three days later, on 16 March, news of revolution in Vienna and the dismissal of Metternich reached Berlin, and popular excitement rose even further. A large crowd collected outside the royal palace. The King appeared on the balcony and was loudly cheered. He then ordered the troops to clear the crowds, and shots were fired either in panic or by accident after some jostling and grabbing at horses' reins had taken place. The crowd shouted 'Down with the army' and a riot broke out. Fighting was fierce.

- 1 Everywhere students, citizens, artisans and working men rushed into the streets, supplied themselves with weapons, ammunition, axes and iron bars and rushed to the barricades, which in some streets reached to the first floor windows. By seven o'clock most of
- 5 the Königstrasse had been taken by the soldiers – the whole street swam with blood.

Fighting continued during the night, and at least three hundred rioters were killed, and large numbers injured or arrested.

The King, who all his life hated bloodshed and, most untypically for a Prussian, disliked the army and all military matters, decided to make a personal appeal for peace and calm. He wrote a letter 'To my dear Berliners' at 3 a.m. Copies were quickly printed and were put up on trees in the city centre early on the morning of Sunday, 19 March. It promised that the troops would be withdrawn if the street barricades were demolished. The concluding sentence read:

- 1 Listen to the paternal voice of your King, you inhabitants of my true and beautiful Berlin; and forget the past, as I shall forget it, for

the sake of that great future, which under the peace-giving blessing of God, is dawning upon Prussia, and through Prussia upon all  
5 Germany.

For a time it seemed that the impossible might happen, absolutism might give way to democracy and Frederick William might become a popular, constitutional monarch.

- 1 In the course of the morning of 21st the King appeared in the streets on horseback with the German colours, black, red and gold, round his arm. He was greeted with tumultuous applause . . . he stopped and said 'I am truly proud that it is my capital, where so
- 5 powerful an opinion has manifested itself. This day is a great day and ought never to be forgotten. The colours I wear are not my own; I do not mean to usurp anything with them. . . . I want liberty; I will have unity in Germany'. He spoke again of German unity in a proclamation issued on the same day 'From this day forth
- 10 the name of Prussia is fused and dissolved in that of Germany'.

What were Frederick William's motives for this behaviour? It is sometimes argued that by riding through the streets wearing the black, red and gold 'colours of freedom' he was not submitting to the revolution from necessity, nor joining it out of conviction, but by putting himself at its head was trying to take it over and so regain control. The argument can be taken further. The reference in his later proclamation to Prussia being absorbed in Germany has been interpreted as an attempt by Frederick William to overcome the dangers of the Prussian revolution by proposing himself as the leader of a German national revolution. It seems more probable, in view of his unstable character, that he was carried away by the emotion of the occasion and felt, at least for a short time, that he was indeed destined to be a popular monarch and national leader.

\* In the following days Frederick William granted a series of general reforms, accepted constitutional government in principle and agreed to the election of an assembly to draw up a new constitution for Prussia. He appeared the very model of a liberal monarch. But his change of heart did not last long. As soon as he had escaped from Berlin, he expressed very different feelings. He spoke of humiliation at the way he had been forced to make concessions to the people, no longer his 'dear Berliners', and made it clear that he now believed there could be no close relationship between a king and his subjects.

Nevertheless, he kept his word. Elections were held for the new assembly as promised and liberal ministers were appointed. The assembly began to debate a new constitution for Prussia, but before its work was completed Frederick William dissolved the assembly and proclaimed a constitution of his own.

\* The Prussian constitution of late 1848 was a strange mixture of liberal policies and absolutism. There was to be a representative

assembly, with two houses. The upper house would be elected by older property owners, and the lower one by manhood suffrage. The King could, however, in emergency suspend civil rights and collect taxes without reference to Parliament. Ministers were to be appointed and dismissed by the King, and were to be responsible only to him and not to Parliament. The King would also have the right to alter the written constitution at anytime it suited him to do so.

The new proposals were well received in Prussia, and ministers made no secret of the fact that they hoped it would be a better model for a united Germany than the Frankfurt Parliament. They had ambitions to make Prussia the leading state in Germany, and Frederick William the leading monarch. They hoped that Germany would be united not by a national Parliament, but by control imposed by Prussia.

\* In March 1849 the Frankfurt Parliament voted, halfheartedly (290 votes in favour, 240 abstentions), to elect Frederick William as Emperor of a united Germany. A deputation set off to offer him the crown, but he refused it:

- 1 About the crown which the *Pauluskirche* has for sale; every German nobleman is a hundred times too good to accept such a diadem moulded out of the dirt and dregs of revolution, disloyalty and treason . . . if accepted, it demands from me incalculable sacrifices
- 5 and burdens me with heavy duties. The German National Assembly has counted on me in all things, which were calculated to establish the unity, power and glory of Germany. I feel honoured by their confidence . . . but I should not justify that confidence if I, violating sacred rights, were, without the voluntary assent of the
- 10 crowned princes and free states of our Fatherland, to take a resolution, which must be of decisive importance to them and to the states which they rule'.

Frederick William declined the crown on the grounds that it was not the Parliament's to offer. He would only accept it if the offer came from his equals, his fellow princes. He distrusted 'the gentlemen of Frankfurt' who had, he believed, taken it upon themselves to speak for a united Germany without any legal authority. In any case he was not prepared to be Emperor of Germany if it meant putting himself and the Kingdom of Prussia under the control of the Frankfurt Parliament. It is ironic that Frederick William, who all his life, dreamed of reviving the glories of the Holy Roman Empire, felt unable to accept the Imperial crown of a new German Empire when it was offered to him.

#### 4 Failure of the Revolutions

By 1850 it seemed as if the events of the two previous years had never been; nothing had changed in most of the states. All traces of the Frankfurt Parliament were quickly cleared away. The black, red and

gold 'flag of freedom' was removed from the hall of the Diet. The ships which the Parliament had bought as the nucleus of a national fleet were sold off at auction.

Constitutional changes obtained from their rulers in Saxony, Hanover and several smaller states were revoked, and liberals all over Germany were arrested and imprisoned. Some were even executed. The lucky ones escaped into exile. In Prussia police powers were increased and local government powers reduced. The 'three-class suffrage' was introduced in elections for the Prussian lower house. This system, based on tax liability, ensured that the richest sectors of society would be the most fully represented.

\* Why was so little achieved in Germany in the revolutions of 1848–9? Active revolution was comparatively slight. In Prussia it was restricted to riots in Berlin and unrest in the Rhineland and Silesia. In the small states of the south-west, poverty stricken peasants attacked their landlords, castles were stormed and property destroyed. In Baden a people's republic was briefly proclaimed. It had little support and was quickly suppressed by the liberal government. Most revolutionary activity in Germany did not involve armed uprisings. Meetings, peaceful demonstrations and petitions were the chief weapons of the revolution. There was little fighting.

The years leading up to 1848 had seen increased political activity. In 1846 the Grand Duke of Baden had been forced to accept a liberal constitution, and the following year the Elector of Hesse-Cassel had been prevented from making reactionary changes to the local constitution. In 1848 other rulers gave in easily, if temporarily, to demands for more democratic governments. They seem generally to have felt that to oppose the widespread demands for political change might lead to their overthrow. The sensible course of action was to give way on easily reversed issues until the discontent subsided. But in those states where the rulers granted concessions, willing or unwillingly, they wisely retained control of their armed forces. All they had to do was simply wait for an opportunity to regain power. Growing disunity among the revolutionaries gave them that opportunity. There were wide differences in the political aims of liberals and radicals. While the former wanted constitutional government in all states and a united Empire with a national parliament, the latter worked for complete social and political change within a republican framework. Nor were the nationalists united in their specifications. There was no agreement on the form the new Germany should take – a unified state or a federation, a monarchy or republic, *Grossdeutschland* or *Kleindeutschland*?

Class differences added to the disunity. The majority of workers and peasants had a purely practical and immediate revolutionary aim: the removal of the intolerable pressures on their lives. They were not concerned with political ideologies, but their radical leaders were. Because most liberals were middle class the radical-liberal conflict merged into a



wider class struggle.

Popular enthusiasms are often short lived and within a few months much of the active support for national unity and a national parliament had disappeared. This loss of support was encouraged by the slow progress being made by the Frankfurt Parliament.

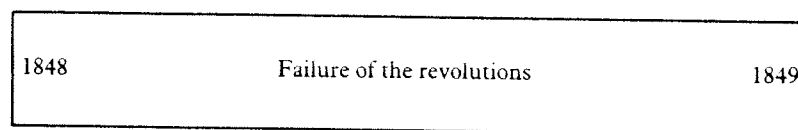
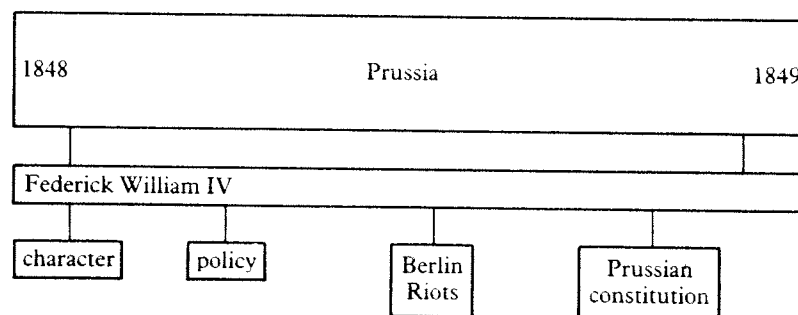
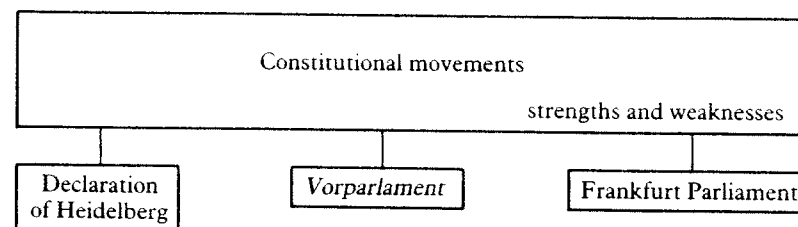
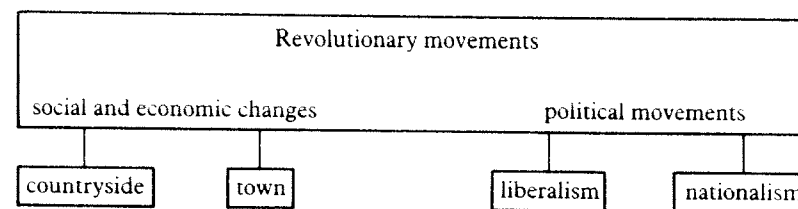
All these divisive elements weakened the revolutions, but in the end they failed because the enemy was stronger, better organized and above all possessed military power. The story might have been very different in Berlin if there had not been a well equipped, well trained army available to the King and his government. Given their military and economic advantages, their determination and often their ruthlessness, the Princes were bound to win in the end. Constitutional government and national unity could only be achieved on their terms, not through the well intentioned but ineffectual efforts of a liberal parliament, or by the unco-ordinated actions of popular revolt. And it was clear in 1848 that attractive as might be the idea of a strong and united Germany in theoretical terms, the rulers felt that they had too much to lose by supporting the practicalities of unification offered by the Frankfurt Parliament. Generally they had no wish to see their powers limited by liberal constitutions and a powerful central authority. In any case, once order was restored in the Austrian Empire and the policy from Vienna was still based on dominating Germany by keeping her weak and divided, there was no possibility of any moves towards a more united Germany being allowed to take place. Germany would only be unified once the military might and moral authority of the Austrian Empire had been overcome.

### ***Making Notes on 'Germany in Revolution 1848–49'***

Your notes on this chapter should give you an understanding of the causes of the revolutionary movements of 1848–9 and of the political and constitutional developments associated with them. You should also have a framework on which to base a discussion of the reason why, in the end, so little was achieved. In addition you should have an outline of the important events taking place in Prussia in the same year.

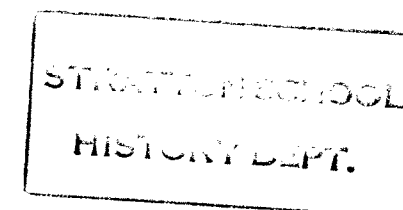
The following headings and subheadings should be helpful in making your notes:

1. Causes of Revolutionary Movements
  - 1.1. Population changes
  - 1.2. Economic problems
    - in the countryside
    - in the town
  - 1.3. Popular demands
  - 1.4. Middle class
  - 1.5. Political movements



*Summary – Germany in revolution, 1848–49*

2. Constitutional Movements
  - 2.1. Baden
  - 2.2. Declaration of Heidelberg
  - 2.3. The Vorparlament
  - 2.4. The Frankfurt Parliament





- 2.5. The Provisional Central Power
- 2.6. Territorial problems
- 2.7. The army
- 2.8. Constitutional agreement
- 2.9. The failure of the Parliament
- 2.10. Causes of failure
- 3. Prussia
  - 3.1. Frederick William IV
  - 3.2. Berlin Riots
  - 3.3. Reforms
  - 3.4. Prussian constitution
  - 3.5. The Imperial Crown
- 4. Failure of the Revolutions
  - 4.1. Causes of failure

### *Answering essay questions on 'Germany in Revolution 1848–49'*

You may need to use the information from this chapter to answer general questions of the type discussed on page 105, but you are quite likely to be asked questions concentrating just on the events of these two very important years.

An example of such a question is:

Why did the Frankfurt Parliament fail to achieve its aims? (Cambridge, 1981)

This is a straightforward 'Why' question. Construct an essay plan by going through the following three stages:

1. Make a list of statements which provide a direct answer to this question. Begin each with the word 'because' for example 'because it was unrepresentative' and 'because it lacked effective power'. There should be six or seven statements.
2. List the facts you need to include for each statement to substantiate it.
3. Decide on an order of importance for your statements. Number them accordingly. Would you start with the most or the least important? Why?

Another question on this period, for which it would also be well worth making an essay plan, is:

Why did the revolutionaries of 1848 achieve so little in Germany? (WJEC, 1982)

What would you include in an answer to this question that you have not included in the essay plan for the first question?

### *Source-based questions on, 'Germany in Revolution 1848–49'*

#### **1 German nationalism, 1847**

Read carefully the extract from Prince Hohenlohe's Memorandum, given on page 26. Answer the following questions:

- a) In one sentence describe the main idea of his argument.
- b) Hohenlohe makes several assertions presented as fact, not as opinion. Identify two such assertions and comment on their validity.
- c) Does Hohenlohe rely more on reason or on emotion to persuade his readers of the rightness of his argument? Explain your answer.

#### **2 The Declaration of Heidelberg, 1848**

Read carefully the extracts from the Declaration of Heidelberg, given on page 27. Answer the following questions:

- a) What policies did the authors favour in foreign affairs?
- b) What was the attitude of the Declaration's authors towards the existing governments of the German states? Explain your answer.
- c) What evidence do the extracts contain to suggest that the 51 men who met at Heidelberg were generally conservative in economic and social matters?

#### **3 Civil disturbances, 1848**

Read carefully the description of the riot in Berlin, given on page 34, and answer the following questions:

- a) Who, according to the author of the extract, took part in the fighting against the soldiers? What tentative conclusions could you reach from a detailed consideration of the words he uses to describe the rioters?
- b) What internal evidence does the extract contain to suggest that this account is unlikely to be reliable in matters of factual detail?

#### **4 The views of Frederick William IV**

Read carefully the four extracts from the writings and reported speeches of Frederick William IV, given on pages 33, 34, 35 and 36. Answer the following questions:

- a) Describe Frederick William's attitude towards the Divine Right of Kings, using evidence from the extract on page 33.
- b) Does the concluding sentence of Frederick William's letter 'To my dear Berliners', quoted on page 34, support or contradict the attitude shown in the extract on page 33? Explain your answer.
- c) What reasonable explanations could be offered for Frederick William's actions as described in the extract on page 35?
- d) What reasons does Frederick William give for not accepting the offer of the Imperial crown from the Frankfurt Parliament?
- e) What suggestions can be made about the attitudes and character of Frederick William IV using evidence from the four extracts?